



The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown

Paul Malmont

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Based on an incredible true episode of World War II history, Paul Malmont's new novel is a rollicking blend of fact and fiction about the men and women who were recruited to defeat the Nazis and ended up creating the future.

In 1943, when the United States learns that Germany is on the verge of a deadly innovation that could tip the balance of the war, the government turns to an unlikely source for help: the nation's top science fiction writers. Installed at a covert military lab within the Philadelphia Naval Yard are the most brilliant of these young visionaries. The unruly band is led by Robert Heinlein, the dashing and complicated master of the genre. His "Kamikaze Group," which includes the ambitious genius Isaac Asimov, is tasked with transforming the wonders of science fiction into science fact and unlocking the secrets to invisibility, death rays, force fields, weather control, and other astounding phenomena—and finding it harder than they ever imagined.

When a German spy washes ashore near the abandoned Long Island ruins of a mysterious energy facility, the military begins to fear that the Nazis are a step ahead of Heinlein's group. Now the oddball team, joined by old friends from the Pulp Era including L. Ron Hubbard (court-martialed for attacking Mexico), must race to catch up. The answers they seek may be locked in the legendary War of Currents, which was fought decades earlier between Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison. As the threat of an imminent Nazi invasion of America grows more and more possible, events are set in motion that just may revolutionize the future—or destroy it—while forcing the writers to challenge the limits of talent, imagination, love, destiny, and even reality itself.

Blazing at breathtaking speed from forgotten tunnels deep beneath Manhattan to top-secret battles in the North Pacific, and careening from truth to pulp and back again, *The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown* is a sweeping, romantic epic—a page-turning rocket ship ride through the history of the future.

The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown Details

Date : Published (first published July 5th 2011)

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Author : Paul Malmont

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Historical, Historical Fiction, Alternate History, Fantasy, Mystery, Adventure

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From Reader Review The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown for online ebook

Jann Barber says

Based on a true episode from World War II, this novel takes place in 1943 when the US government enlists the aid of a group of science fiction writers to develop death rays, jet packs, and other things that they write about in an effort to help defeat the enemy.

Robert "Bob" Heinlein, L. Ron Hubbard, Isaac "don't call me Ike" Asimov, and Sprague de Camp are just a few of the names the reader will recognize. Nikola Tesla's and Thomas Edison's prior war over electricity plays a part in the story. Einstein makes an appearance and even Jimmy Stewart has a cameo as a pilot who has to fly one of the writers somewhere.

The title is taken from the name of three pulp magazines that published science fiction stories.

Personal lives of the writers also played a part in the development of the story. I thought it was interesting to learn about Hubbard's involvement with Parsons and can see where his development of Scientology got its start.

There is also an interesting plot twist near the end that I didn't see coming. That's all I'll say.

I now have Malmont's first book and probably should have read it prior to this one, but it wasn't available at the time.

D.L. Morrese says

I'd classify this as historical fiction with some of the leading science fiction authors of the mid twentieth century as the main characters (with walk on parts for a couple notable scientists). The pulp writers have been collected by the U.S. government to imagine and develop sci-fi inspired technology to help with the war effort (WWII), and they soon become obsessed with the lost research of Nikola Tesla. It's a clever premise and a good read, overall, but the lack of a clear protagonist makes it less absorbing than it could have been.

Jeff Swystun says

Malmont establishes a fun premise. A group of pulp/scifi authors are assembled to help defeat the Axis powers during WW2. These include Asimov, Heinlein, Hubbard, DeCamp and others. They are instructed to help realize the amazing weapons they have envisioned in their stories. I was caught up in it from the start but soon felt too much like an outsider owing to the author's detailed references. Unlike Chabon's Kavalier and Clay, I was not invited in to learn more. Rather, I felt more and more excluded with each page. Plus it dragged on so those pages became heavy. For some this will be an absolute treat so I do not want to be harsh...it was simply not my cup of tea.

Kat Hooper says

4.5 stars

ORIGINALLY POSTED AT Fantasy Literature.

It's 1943 and World War II is going strong. There are rumors that the Nazis and the Japanese may be about to unleash a deadly secret weapon against America and people are afraid. But America may be able to create some secret weapons of its own, and who better to imagine and design them than the smartest science fiction writers of the age? So, under the direction of John W. Campbell (editor of the SFF magazines *Astounding* and *Unknown*), the Navy recruits Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, L. Sprague de Camp, and L. Ron Hubbard to turn their imaginations into scientific discoveries.

At first, the goals are simple: make the Navy's ships invisible to radar, control the weather, defy gravity... But when the SF boys find out that recently-deceased (and possibly murdered) Nikola Tesla had a secret journal describing the construction and use of his own anti-aircraft deathray, pulp-style adventure ensues. Not only do they need to find out how Tesla's weapon works (surely he used alternating current), they must also evade the War Department, which has suddenly taken an interest in their activities. It seems the Feds have read Cleve Cartmill's story "Deadline" (published in *Astounding*) which describes how to make a nuclear bomb. But perhaps most frightening of all is that the SF geeks have to contend with a group of Navy sailor bullies. They can't compete with them physically, but they can use their brains to get revenge!

The plot of *The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown* takes a while to get going and is interrupted frequently for the insertion of real facts and history because more than anything, Paul Malmont's novel is a tribute to 1940s science fiction and the men who wrote and compiled it for the "mags." Thus, readers will learn all about Robert A. Heinlein's naval career, tuberculosis, hair loss, and how the biochemist who will become his third (and last) wife influences his politics. Readers will also learn about Isaac Asimov's fear of flying and some history that explains the development of L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology cult. Other pulp personalities such as Norvell Page, Lester Dent, Hugo Gernsback, William Gibson, and Frederik Pohl appear in unlikely but amusing places. I think Paul Malmont's greatest accomplishment, though, is that he shows us how the imagination anticipates and creates scientific discovery and the advancement of our society.

The audiobook version of *The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown*, which was excellently narrated by Christopher Lane and produced by Brilliance Audio, arrived on my doorstep at just the right time. I happened to be reading some pulps recently (always trying to catch up on all the SF history I missed by being born too late), including L. Sprague de Camp's Harold Shea stories, which are lovingly mentioned by Malmont. Any science fiction fan has to appreciate Malmont's obvious affection for the genre.

Not only was this a fun, and sometimes very funny story, but I learned a lot, too. I recommend that anyone who's not familiar with the Golden Age of Science Fiction, and the way that John Campbell and his favorite SF writers changed the history of SF, do a bit of research before reading *The Astounding, the Amazing, and the Unknown*. I think you'll get much more out of it. But, even if you don't, it's astoundingly entertaining, as any pulp story should be.

Nick says

A review mentioning that the basis of this novel is the fact that Robert Heinlein and some other science fiction writers had worked at the Philadelphia Navy Yard during World War Two caught my attention. Curiosity led me to this enjoyable, clever and witty book. The main characters include familiar names to fans of science fiction, fantasy and pulp fiction, including the creators of *The Shadow* and *Doc Savage*, not to

mention L. Ron Hubbard. Cameos by people like Albert Einstein and John W. Campbell and references to science fiction and fantasy stories add to the fun, as does Malmont's working of historical facts like the FBI's interest in a Cleve Cartmill story about a nuclear weapon. I'm not sure how much fun this is to read if you aren't an avid reader of classic science fiction, particularly the authors who are the protagonists. If after reading this, you get the word play in the novel's title, then this book is for you. If not, the title lists the three most popular/prestigious science fiction and fantasy pulps of the era.

Bondama says

For a book that held SO much promise, "The Astounding...etc." was a real let-down. The concept is nothing short of fantastic. During WWII, the American government was so desperate to defeat the Germans that they hired a bunch of science fiction writers (all pulp writers at this time) to form a think-tank: to make some of the outrageous things they'd written about (making ships disappear, etc....)

Isaac Asimov is here, Robert Heinlein is here (he was once voted the best science fiction writer alive), L. Sprague de Camp (who wound up writing more fantasy than sci-fi.) - You get the idea. But the funniest character in the book is the IN-famous L. Ron Hubbard. -- Yes, the inventor of Scientology. Even the Navy threw him out! - Incompetent doesn't even begin to describe Mr. Hubbard - but his portrait in the book is a scream.

All of this should have added up to a wonderful romp through old pulp sci-fi, with a few stabs at government regulations. But something falls flat, here, sadly. The Author just doesn't bring it off.

Tim Schneider says

In some ways this is a little bit of a hard book for me to review. Some time in 2007 or 2008 I came up with the idea for a novel based at the Philadelphia Naval Yard with Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and Sprague de Camp as the main characters and with the Philadelphia Experiment and Nikola Tesla at the center of the plot. I still have my notes on it, but I never got around to writing it. But Paul Malmont did in his sequel to The Chinatown Death Cloud Peril. Of course he added in L. Ron Hubbard and small appearances by Lester Dent and Walter Gibson. And it's probably better than what I had in mind.

I liked the book...though definitely not as much as Chinatown. And I think that's for a few reasons. One is that Chinatown was very successful at conveying a "pulp" feel. While SF was still pulp during the war, John W. Campbell (who gets a small part in the book) had managed to start what we now call the Golden Age of Science Fiction and the feel was very much not the same as the "superhero" pulps that were the focus of Chinatown. This book just never quite felt like the Golden Age of SF.

The other problem is that Malmont has definite ticks. In Chinatown, he kept talking about Heinlein and Hubbard being so much younger than Dent even though there was only three years difference in age between Dent and Heinlein and Heinlein had been a Naval officer. Here it was possibly more egregious. I was okay with Asimov being written about as younger, because he was still a college student before he went to work at the Naval Yard. But referring to Sprague de Camp as "The Kid" was ridiculous. He was four years older and infinitely more cosmopolitan than Hubbard. It's a tick that really started to bug me.

And while I understand where Malmont was going bringing in Gertie Asimov and Leslyn Heinlein to the story, they just were never nearly as interesting as Norma Dent was in Chinatown. The resolution of the plot

didn't quite work for me. It wasn't quite pulp...though it was a bit...but it sure wasn't SF.

All this would seem to indicate that I didn't really care for the book. And I did. It's still a fun read. And a lot of it worked well. It just wasn't nearly as good as Chinatown and it just didn't hit the buttons that I wanted it to hit.

Probably closer to 3 1/2 stars...but I rounded up.

Jean says

I don't think I would have enjoyed this book as much if it weren't for the characters being authors I've read. Interesting, though.

James Kelly says

Three and a half stars actually. I was quite taken by the sheer effrontery of this book, which fictionalized several of the sf writers I grew up on. It's delicious fun, if a somewhat trashy read, in that the plot is so unlikely and so unwieldy and yet it continually touches down in reality. It has the verisimilitude of history, but it isn't, of course. It's a little like Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*. What gave me a tickle of unease was the realization that if Malmont could do this to Heinlein, Asimov & Co, then some future Malmont could do this to me and Kessel and Willis and Swanwick. With Dozois as our ringleader, as Campbell is here. What would be wrong with that? Dunno, but it makes my skin feel too tight.

Peter Tillman says

Well, I was looking forward to this one -- but it opens really S-L-O-W. So I'm not sure this is one for me. Off to look at less-favorable reviews.....

OK: "a stilted mish-mash of real & fictional events around WW2" (1-star).
"Disjointed and annoying to follow...wish I had put it down." (1-star).

Still, most people liked it. Maybe I'll skip past some of the boring stuff & hope it gets going into fun. If not, well.....

Untouched in over two weeks. Lots of other stuff to read. Not looking good.....

Steven says

A splendid romp through WWII era science fiction and fantasy pro-dom, with a completely demented story to tie together real people and curiously real events.

j says

Inside baseball for sci-fi geeks, provided your knowledge base goes alllllll the way back.

Wayne McCoy says

A really fun read set during World War 2 and imagining the great Pulp and Science Fiction writers of the time were involved with the war effort. The main characters of the book are Robert Heinlein, L. Sprague DeCamp, Isaac Asimov and L. Ron Hubbard, but there are tons of cameos by other folks living at the time (including Walter Gibson and Richard Feynman to name just a couple and leave the rest for you to discover). Also included are references to the Philadelphia Experiment and Tesla's Wardencllyffe tower.

Steven says

3.5 stars really--might have been higher if the author hadn't strained my suspension of disbelief on more than one occasion in this book.

An interesting conceit--Pulp science fiction authors (Campbell, Heinlein, Asimov, de Camp, and Hubbard along with a host of cameos and drop-ins by older and contemporary WWII pulp writers) try to make science fiction into fact for the War Department...and everyone suspects their intentions and abilities...and I loved the way the author worked Tesla's "failed" tech and the Philadelphia Experiment into the plot.

Not having met any of the principal people in any way beyond their fiction or essays, I can't say whether or not the characters match them. Still, while a few coincidences and strains to credulity nearly derailed my reading, the ending delivered on a fun premise.

Richard Derus says

Rating: 3.5* of five

The Publisher Says: Based on an incredible true episode of World War II history, Paul Malmont's new novel is a rollicking blend of fact and fiction about the men and women who were recruited to defeat the Nazis and ended up creating the future.

In 1943, when the United States learns that Germany is on the verge of a deadly innovation that could tip the balance of the war, the government turns to an unlikely source for help: the nation's top science fiction writers. Installed at a covert military lab within the Philadelphia Naval Yard are the most brilliant of these young visionaries. The unruly band is led by Robert Heinlein, the dashing and complicated master of the genre. His "Kamikaze Group," which includes the ambitious genius Isaac Asimov, is tasked with transforming the wonders of science fiction into science fact and unlocking the secrets to invisibility, death rays, force fields, weather control, and other astounding phenomena—and finding it harder than they ever imagined.

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military begins to fear that the Nazis are a step ahead of Heinlein's group. Now the oddball team, joined by old friends from the Pulp Era including L. Ron Hubbard (court-martialed for attacking Mexico), must race to catch up. The answers they seek may be locked in the legendary War of Currents, which was fought decades earlier between Nikola Tesla and Thomas Edison. As the threat of an imminent Nazi invasion of America grows more and more possible, events are set in motion that just may revolutionize the future—or destroy it—while forcing the writers to challenge the limits of talent, imagination, love, destiny, and even reality itself.

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My Review: The Philadelphia Experiment, a real project that took place during WWII and produced a long-lived tale of a whole ship that *poof* vanished from Philadelphia Navy Yard, was seen in Norfolk, Virginia, then *poof* reappeared in Philadelphia in far less time than it would take to sail there, is the backdrop of this fantabulous beast of a Franken-novel. Facts are here aplenty, stitched to the imaginative suppositions of the author, and the tale enacted by the great science fiction writers of the First Golden Age: Robert Heinlein, ex-Navy man and scientist; Isaac Asimov, unfit for combat service but a chemist earning his PhD at Columbia when roped into the Philadelphia Experiment; Lester Dent, Walter Gibson, L. Ron Hubbard (blech)...and their wives, their lesser lights, and a seemingly endless cast of characters famous if you know who they are, like Lyman Binch, the only person to work for both Tesla and Edison.

The author propels his cast from pillar to post and back again. He puts them in incredibly perilous situations, he makes it impossible for them to survive, and then rescues them via last-minute coincidences and harum-scarum action. And in the end, after assembling the dramatis personae via the most unsubtle ruse of them all, he actually solves Tunguska, Wardencllyffe, and the Philadelphia Experiment, with a side order of conspiracy theory, in ~30pp.

I'm exhausted.

Fairly happily so, I admit. The dialogue bears down a little much on the side of "As you know, Bob..." and "the reason I've brought you all here tonight is...", but for most people under 60 that really is the only way he can tell his story and make it even faintly believable.

What's most appealing about the novel is its true-to-the-pulps feel. I like the way it honors the genre of the dear, dead pulp science fiction mags of the 30s through the 60s by using--with a wryly arched eyebrow--their every convention, technique, and trope, then with a short coda, bringing the modern sensibility in harmony with the pulpish piffle that has quite enjoyably rollicked on before.

Mr. Malmont sent me a very nicely inscribed ARC of the novel when I won it in a contest on his website. It struck me that he's a lot like the old pulp writers. He's an advertising copywriter who clearly loves popular fiction in the SF genre, and is at home telling tales to entertain you, his reader, as he entertains himself. He's good at evoking mood and atmosphere. He's happiest when busiest, too.

My god...wouldn't surprise me a bit to find out he was a robot. o.0

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